

# RISING GENERATIONS

## THE UPPER ROOM



“Gross!” I muttered, slamming down the lid of our stinky trash can. Taking out the trash is my least favorite chore!

As I turned to go inside, the bushes rustled. Then a raccoon ran through the yard, across the street, and into the woods. He was so cute!

When I told my family about the raccoon, Mom said, “He probably wanted to dig through the trash can for something to eat.”

“I’d better fix the lid so he can’t open it,” said Dad, heading outside.

**I felt sorry for the raccoon.** He must be *really* hungry if he was willing to eat garbage! I had to help him.

I went online and read an article about

raccoons. It explained that raccoons like all kinds of food—even peanut butter. It also said they’re mostly nocturnal, which means they usually come out at night like the raccoon I saw.

**There was also a warning** not to feed them. But I figured that didn’t count when an animal needed help. I love all animals, and I certainly wasn’t going to let a poor, hungry raccoon starve!

The next day at sunset, I left an apple near the trash can and watched out our glass door. It got dark, but the light from our neighbors’ house helped me see.

The raccoon never returned, so I

gave up. But the next morning, not even one apple seed was left.

That night I put out a couple of



peanut-butter cookies. And I saw the raccoon eat them! He looked so cute sitting up and holding them with his front paws. The poor thing was so hungry he snarfed them down in seconds. Then he headed back across the street to the woods.

After that, I left food for Randy (that's what I named him) every evening. I couldn't wait around every time, but I often got to see Randy eating. He was almost like a pet.

**I decided not to tell anyone about Randy.** My brother, Elijah, would just find some reason to give me a hard time about it. And what if my parents agreed with the article about not feeding raccoons? They like animals, but they might not understand this special situation. Randy needed me.

One night I looked out the glass door, and Randy stared right back! He was standing on his hind feet with his front paws on the glass. He looked so funny and so cute!

**"Wow!" cried Elijah** from behind me. Then he hurried off. Was he going to tell Mom and Dad?

"Go away, Randy!" I cried, waving my arms around. "Go on!" But he wouldn't leave!

Elijah came back with his phone. "This is so cool!" he

said. He snapped several photos before Randy finally scampered away.

**Mom and Dad were surprised** when Elijah showed them the pictures. Dad checked the trash can, but he didn't see any problem. I guess Randy had already eaten the crackers I left for him.

Elijah showed the photos around youth group the next night. Everybody smiled and said how cute Randy was—except Elijah's friend Carson.

"That's weird," he said. "Raccoons don't usually come close to humans unless they're being fed." Carson is some kind of nature expert—or thinks he is.

"Maybe he's starving," I said quickly.

"He looks pretty healthy," said Carson.

**Elijah gave me a funny look,** but he didn't say anything. Until later that night when he caught me leaving some grapes by the trash can.

"I knew it!" he said. "You're not supposed to feed wild animals, Grace!"

"But I can't let that poor raccoon starve," I said.

"Grace, get real. That raccoon isn't starving," he said. "Raccoons can eat almost anything—even garbage."

"So?" I said, feeling embarrassed.





“What’s wrong with being nice to an animal? I mean...don’t you like animals?”

“Of course, I like animals!”

But he wasn’t a true animal lover like me because he added, “Stop feeding the raccoon. Or I’m telling Mom and Dad.”

“Okay!” But I cared too much about Randy to actually stop. I just made sure Elijah didn’t catch me again.

**Elijah didn’t tell Mom and Dad,** but he *did* tell Carson. I could tell because one night Carson came over with an article he had printed out called “Don’t Feed the Animals!”

“This explains all the reasons you shouldn’t feed wild animals,” he told me.

“Randy isn’t really wild,” I told him. “I don’t think he’s afraid of me at all.”

**“That’s even more** of a problem,” said Carson. “Being afraid of humans helps to protect wild animals from getting hurt.”

“Relax,” I said. “Elijah already told me to stop.” Which was true.

While the boys were down in the game room, I took a handful of pretzels outside. I was spreading them on the ground when I heard squealing tires. Looking up, I saw a car stopped in the middle of the road with its headlights shining on Randy!

**Randy ran** safely back to the woods, but my heart was pounding. He could have been killed! And it would have been my fault. I had encouraged him to hang around by feeding him. He really wasn’t afraid of me. I realized now how dangerous that was for him.

I thought about what Carson said. If I really cared about Randy, I had to let him live the way God had created him to live—as a wild animal. Somehow, I would have to discourage Randy from coming to our yard. (Maybe my parents could help me figure out how.) And I could never feed him again.

**I felt sad** as I cleaned up the pretzels. I would miss seeing Randy, but I knew I had to think about what was best for him.

As I headed inside, I looked towards the woods and said, “Bye, Randy.”

I really do love animals. ■

